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BOOK REVIEWS.

The Little Red Book of Bristol. Published under the Authority of the Council of the City and County of Bristol. Edited by FRANCIS B. BICKLEY. Bristol: 1900. 4to, 2 vols., pp. xxxviii + 249 and viii + 283.

To the honour of Almighty God and for the tranquility of the inhabitants of the town of Bristol at the request of the Commonalty of the same town, I, William de Colford, Recorder there, in the eighteenth year of the reign of King Edward III. after the conquest [1344] have caused the ordinances, customs, and liberties hereunder set down, made for the commonalty of the aforesaid town to be recorded and entered in this book together with certain laws, other memoranda and divers necessary things to be inviolably kept in perpetual remembrance. [And] Whereas many good customs of the aforesaid town having been abused and some almost forgotten, on Wednesday next before the feast of Saint Katharine the Virgin in the year aforesaid, . . . the customs and ordinances in use from old time were gone over and approved [by the Mayor and Council] some being then amended with others newly made to be observed forever.

So runs a translation of a part of the first entry in the Little Red Book, and it discloses to us the inception and the purpose of the volume. It seems to have served as a sort of register or book of record, and the "ordinances, customs, liberties, together with certain laws, other memoranda, and divers necessary things" to be kept in perpetual remembrance, form a heterogeneous mass of contents. All these matters occur in the book in no special order or plan of arrangement; for 150 years after William de Colford successive mayors, with the assent of their council, ordered entries to be made, and the recorder seems to have inserted them in any part of the volume where there was convenient space.

Mr. Bickley, the editor, has found it necessary therefore to anticipate the reviewer, and to offer in the introduction a classification of the documents recorded, and has accompanied his classification with copious and helpful comments. He divides the contents into four groups. The first consists of liberties and franchises of the town,

oaths of officials, recognizances for orphans, ordinances of the common council, etc.; and the editor classes these all together because they are matters which peculiarly affect Bristol. There is little in this group that will lack significance to one interested in the development of local government and municipal regulation of economic life. But he will be disappointed who hopes that by means of the Little Red Book this development can be consecutively traced, for it includes only a small part of what it is essential for us to know. Far from a complete list of the liberties and franchises, and a comparatively small part of the town ordinances, are to be found in it. The royal charters and other grants of privileges seem to have been preserved among the archives of the town, and were sufficiently easy of access there, whilst the greater part of the proceedings and decrees of the council were perhaps not deemed worthy of "perpetual remembrance." Of the ordinances, however, two elaborate sets are given us, besides a number of others occurring singly and relating to specific subjects. The first set was adopted in 1344, and embodies the ancient customs of the town; the second is of later date, though still of the fourteenth century, and differs in no essential respect from the first. Both sets are miscellaneous in matter and arrangement. The duties of officials, the collection of debts, the care of streets, customs regulations, the rate of wages, the residence of strangers, forestalling and engrossing and other trade restrictions, the price of bread and ale, the pleading of writs, admission of burgesses — to such and similar subjects both sets relate, and they present to the reader a distinct view of the functions and policy of the municipal government at the time they were adopted.

The second class of documents consists mainly of ordinances of the craft guilds. Only seventeen of these organizations are enumerated in the Little Red Book, though one of the historians of Bristol records twenty-six in 1449. Nor is there any mention of the Merchant Gild, which certainly existed there as late as 1372. The "Rede Papre of the Yeldhall," as contemporaries called the volume before us, was intended to contain only those regulations that the craft-masters deemed of peculiar importance and those that they found it difficult to enforce. Some crafts, therefore, made much more use of it than others. The dyers, for example, appear in it very frequently; the farriers and allied crafts but once. While it cannot be said, perhaps, of such ordinances as are preserved that they throw any new light upon the nature and development of the guilds, as described in the works of Ashley, Cun-

ningham, and others, yet they certainly illustrate that development in a vivid and interesting manner, and in making them accessible Mr. Bickley has conferred a favor on students of history. The main purpose distinguishable in them all is threefold: to maintain a certain standard of excellence in the work done, to regulate wages in the interest of the masters, and to limit competition. The first of these prevails in the early ordinances, the second appears—for reasons that are familiar to us—in the latter half of the fourteenth century, while during the fifteenth century the third becomes more and more predominant. It is easy to see that Bristol was a progressive town, and that competition was manifesting itself both from within and from without. The dyers complain that many who have been neither masters nor apprentices, and even men of other crafts, are interfering with their employment. The weavers say that the wives and daughters of the masters are taking the place of men at the loom. The hoopers complain that aliens and others are practicing their craft. The cordwainers assert that there are certain masters among them that give work to men of "estraunge countrei." The weavers in 1462 lament the behavior of many of the craft who daily receive and put to work "straungiers and allions, and for their singuler profit provokyn and stere divers marchauntz to bring into their town people of divers countrees not born under the Kynges obeisaunce but rebellious which been sold to theym as hit were hethen people," wherethrough "such straungers and allions beth gretely multeplied and encreased within the Towne." It was in the effort to suppress such competition that the English craft guilds eventually lost their vigor.

The guild ordinances exhibit most distinctly the control exercised over the crafts by the municipal government, a control based on the necessity of municipal sanction in order that the rules of the crafts might be enforced. Thus the dyers passed certain ordinances and had them recorded in the Red Book in 1346, 1381, and 1407, and in the latter year they even had attached to them the seal of the mayor's office. To give them still greater sanction they had them confirmed by royal charters from Henry the Fourth, Henry the Fifth, and Henry the Sixth. And yet in 1439 we find the masters complaining that the ordinances are not observed, and "divers trespassours of ham dredeth not to contrarye and trespass ayhenste ham be cause thei have it not vnder the commone seall for the more warrant, wherethrogh that the seid crafte is gretely hindred and schlaundred;" therefore

they desire them to be confirmed in writing under the common seal, which was done, and we hear of no more complaints from this craft.

The privileges and liberties granted to various other towns, boroughs and manors compose the third class of documents. These were inserted in the Little Red Book apparently in order that the burgesses of Bristol might know what rights visitors to their town could demand. Mr. Bickley does not give these documents in full, since they, or others like them, are easily to be found in print elsewhere.

All the rest of the contents the editor groups together in a fourth class. This is composed of a collection of notes and documents that seem to have nothing whatever in common except that they were deemed important by the business men of Bristol. Among matters of less consequence might be mentioned the Rules of Oleron for the regulation of the merchant service — which the editor does not print, as they have been several times published elsewhere — the Assizes of Bread and Ale, the jurisdiction of the Admiralty, and a remarkable fourteenth-century treatise on the Law Merchant. This treatise is by far the most unique, and in some respects the most important, document in the book. The editor comments with an astonishment in which we participate on its having so long lain unnoticed. In discovering its lurking place, recognizing its importance, and printing it *in extenso*, Mr. Bickley has rendered a boon to many who have long sought in vain for such a succinct, intelligible, and authoritative statement of the principles of this interesting branch of mediæval law.

Such is the Little Red Book, a volume full of material illustrative of the life, activities, and interests of a progressive mediæval municipality. The edition before us is worthy of the contents. Mr. Bickley has shown a praiseworthy discretion in deciding which portions to print in full and which to abstract or merely to enumerate. His notes and comments, both in the introduction and in the text, though always concise, are luminous and adequate. The printers have likewise performed their work with painstaking care. The illustrations, consisting chiefly of reproductions of charters, plans, and documents, have been beautifully executed; the two volumes in which the book appears are handsome in appearance, and are singularly free from misprints and similar defects.

THOMAS WALKER PAGE.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.